

### Comments Regarding Closed Captioning

One of the first things my husband and I did after our then 18 month old daughter was diagnosed as profoundly deaf was turn on the closed captioning feature on our TV. This feature remains on at all times but that does not mean that captioning is always available. While most television shows on PBS and the 3 major networks (at least during the evening) are captioned, I am surprised at the number of cable channels whose programs are not captioned or are not captioned consistently. Additionally, on all networks, the short, filler programming between shows and the commercial advertisements are often not captioned at all. While I'm not a fan of commercials I still feel, in terms of equal access, that they should be captioned. Also, the daily televised news often lacks captioning, especially during live segments and the weather report. However, even pre-recorded segments often lack captioning. Emergency news broadcasts are even worse in terms of how often captioning is provided. Deaf individuals are just as interested in current news as anyone else, they should have access to it via captioning. While captioning live broadcasts must be more difficult, many sports channels do a great job of providing captioning during games. Why can't the news and other sources of live programming do the same? Another aggravation is when a television show or news segment is captioned, only the captioning doesn't run concurrent with the video (i.e., it runs well before or after the video) and thus most understanding is lost.

My daughter is now nearly 7, going into 1<sup>st</sup> grade, and beginning to read. She often asks my husband or I what the words on the TV say, when they are present. Along with PBS, three of her favorite channels are Nickelodeon, Disney, and Cartoon Network. Quite often one episode of a show will be captioned, while another is not (even back-to-back broadcasts). I fail to understand why this is. These are often new shows whose scripts were likely typed on a computer and are thus already in digital form. I can't see that it would be that difficult or costly to use this digital format to provide captioning for the shows. Sure the captioning would need to be revised for clarity, show edits or script changes, but this doesn't seem like it would take that much additional effort. In fact, on many of the shows I watch on the major networks it is apparent that the captioning is based on the original script as sometimes the words in the captioning don't match what is being said by the actor, likely a change during production that didn't get changed on the captioning. While not the absolute ideal, I don't find this so bad as there is not generally a change in meaning so no information is lost. However, if captioning is just plain not there, no information is being provided those who cannot hear what is being said.

Sometimes the problem of no captions may be due to broadcast problems, not lack of captioning. For instance, our local CBS television station often has problems with the captioned component of a show, although the show itself appears fine on the screen. Often I have turned to the other CBS channel (via cable) in order to see the captioning for a show. While the folks at our local station are sympathetic of the situation and understanding about my switching channels, the problem often occurs despite their efforts to fix things. We also have problems with one of the PBS stations we get over cable. The signal is often weak and while the video appears, the captioning does not. On another note, often I know that a particular movie or episode of a show are captioned as I've seen it captioned before or seen a copy of the movie stating it is closed captioned. However, this same show or movie can often be seen on TV without the captions present. You would think that, when available, networks would make the effort to obtain captioned copies of the shows and movies they broadcast.

So, while I very much appreciate the fact that captioning is often available, there is much need for improvement. Having the captioning on has been shown to help improve children's reading skills (for all kids, not just deaf ones). For the sake of my emergent reader daughter, who will be relying on captioning more and more as an information source, I hope these improvements come sooner rather than later.

Sincerely,  
Karen Hearn